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ABSTRACT

The United States ranked ninth among 35 nations in an international study among students in reading, as reported by the Progress in International Reading Literacy. Standards keep going up for students in reading achievement. Literature books for children must be rewritten in keeping up with the times in a demanding school and societal environment. Children need to be motivated to read increasingly challenging reading materials. Authors of children's books must keep in mind that today's children are more sophisticated than before. To assist students in their reading achievement: the school library needs to have many and diverse books; quality sequence in reading materials must be in evidence; it should be remembered that students have diverse purposes in reading and that student purposes in reading need careful consideration; and meaningful reading materials need to be in the offing. This paper also discusses the following: different approaches to teaching literacy; bibliotherapy in literature; and the computer and children's literature. The paper notes that for students to reach higher expectations, they need to be challenged and motivated, not forced to achieve at a higher level. (Contains 10 references.) (NKA)

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Challenge in Children's Literature.

by Marlow Ediger

ED 481 436

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CHALLENGE IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Many comparisons are being made among students in reading achievement. The United States ranked ninth among 35 nations in an international study among students in reading, as reported by the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (Reading Today, 2003). Standards keep going up for students in reading achievement, as indicated in test results. Parents desire their offspring to continually do better in reading achievement.

All students should experience a full day of kindergarten plus two years of quality preschool instruction. Every student should attend summer school for grades one and higher. There should be no limitations for those desiring to attend summer school. The summer months are crucial since much forgetting might occur about what has been learned in reading during the nine months school year. After school tutoring in reading is another possibility to raise reading achievement scores and should be available for all students experiencing difficulty in reading.

Updating Children's Literature

Literature books for children must be written anew in keeping up with the times in a demanding school and societal environment. Thus, challenge is a key concept for in writing and publishing children's literature. Children need to be motivated to read increasingly challenging reading materials. Authors of children's books need to keep in mind that children of today are more sophisticated in knowledge and reading interests than ever before. And, if they lack the necessary achievement, they need to be taught in a manner which optimizes readiness and encourages higher levels of achievement. Intrinsic interests are salient for children to develop in learning. Forcing children to achieve is detrimental and is a negative approach, but motivation and encouragement are positive concepts to use in having children learn. What then might do done to assist students in reading achievement?

First, the school library needs to have ample library books on diverse reading achievement levels to provide for each learner to attain as much as possible. The library books should contain large colorful illustrations for young children and older students who do not read well. Increasingly, more abstract words can be contained in children's library books to provide for individual levels in reading achievement. A variety of titles need to be in the offing, also. Students differ on which titles make for

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active engagement and involvement in reading (Ediger and Rao, 2001, Chapter Six).

Second, quality sequence in reading materials needs to be in evidence. Thus, when a student chooses another library book for reading, he/she selects one which is increasingly difficult in subject matter covered. The teacher can be of great assistance in helping children choose books which truly challenge the intellectual development of the learner. He/she needs to study children to notice at which level a child is reading presently. The teacher, too, needs to notice student enthusiasm for reading as well as for progress being made. By introducing children to a library book, individually or collectively, the teacher can encourage interest in reading. Interest is a powerful factor in learning which might well bridge gaps in sequence.

Third, pupils have diverse purposes involving reading. This is readily noticed by the observer if a child chooses narrative, creative, and/or expository written work. The school needs to have a rational balance among these three kinds of reading materials to meet the content needs of pupils. Each of these three may provide a springboard for a reading/writing connection whereby pupils receive impetus for writing from reading divers types of library books. Learners need much practice in reading to master essential skills and kinds of comprehension. State mandated objectives need to be achieved and test data must reveal that the student has achieved and accomplished in reading.

Fourth, student purposes in reading need careful consideration. These purposes vary much such as recreational reading as compared to reading to secure information for an oral or written report. Library services need to be such that it assists, not hinders, pupil achievement and progress. The school librarian, properly educated and trained, is a very valuable resource to help pupils when assistance is needed. He/she needs to be highly knowledgeable about which book fits into the learner's plans in securing necessary information. The purposes of the student are important when securing library books and/or other media. The library holdings need to include books of diverse genera and content. This might well include content of folk tales, farm animals, zoo and circus animals, travel, people of other lands, science subject matter, stories on mathematics, biographies, autobiographies, historical novels, quality literature for good readers, sports and recreation, and the list goes on to meet learner needs and purposes (Ediger and Rao, 2003, Chapter Eight)..

Fifth, meaningful reading materials need to be in the offing.

Students fail to comprehend content if it lacks meaning. What is not understood requires scaffolding. The adult here needs to provide the missing link in knowledge or skill to the reader. Then meaning might well be attached to what is being read. Scaffolding represents the difference between where the child is in achievement and what is expected of him in reading achievement. A discussion of a related illustration in the library book read may provide the information to fill the gap. Sometimes, questions asked of the student may lead inductively to close the information/skill gap.

A quality children's literature program may be used to supplement in the home setting that which is being done in school. The home and school need to work together for the good of the child. If children raise questions abut what is being read, curiosity is being stressed. Students also need to learn to predict that which will happen next or in the future of content read in the library book. If students can learn to predict, they do understand what is being read presently. Predicting involves linking the past/present with the future in content being considered. Content being read needs to be clarified so that meaning is in evidence in terms of what is being read. Summarizing what has been read indicates the student is understanding ensuing ideas (Ediger and Rao, 2003, Chapter Eleven).

Approaches in Teaching Literacy

When students check out library books for home reading, by themselves or with parental interaction, achievement should occur in literacy. If a word cannot be identified, the parent may say it for the child so that sequential learning is not hindered. If parents are knowledgeable, they may assist the child with phonic, context clues, picture clues, among other word recognition techniques. The point is that a child needs to read as much literature as possible to achieve relevant goals of instruction. The chances are that a child will learn to love reading if self selection of materials is in evidence for reading. During special time set aside for silent reading time in school or during the student's spare time, he/she may pursue activities of personal interest involving print discourse. If the school classroom emphasizes children's literature selections, instead of the basal reader, the learner again may choose what is of personal interest. The child is the chooser of content to be read. During conference time, following the reading of a library book,

the teacher and the pupil may assess the latter's skill in oral reading, fluency in reading, word identification, and comprehension. Comprehension skills might well involve analysis, creative reading, and drawing quality conclusions. The child, too, may reveal further assistance needed such as when he/she

* skips words which hinder development of meaning
* repeats words and phrases, already read correctly
* fails to try in word identification
* does not use meaningful words in context for those not known.
* reads haltingly
* substitutes words for those not recognized in print (See Ganesan, 2003).

When teacher assistance is provided, rapport with the child should be pleasant and assistance given helpful.

Basal readers and their use may be helpful to the child if methods of teaching are used creatively. The manual for the basal has teaching suggestions which may be assessed by the teacher and used if they meet pupil needs. The teacher also soon develops a repertoire of creative methods to use in teaching reading. The teacher needs to assist pupils in

* vocabulary development in a contextual situation
* word attack skills to identify the unknown words
* securing background information, prior to silent or oral reading
* developing comprehension skills involving a variety of purposes
* using ideas read in making for a reading/writing connection (See Brabham and Villaume).

In reading from the basal, the related experiences should be challenging, enjoyed and appreciated, not drudgery and not routine. Good, wholesome attitudes need to be acquired which stress becoming a proficient reader. Continuous reading of diverse materials helps to develop a life long desire to learn, grow, and achieve. Of all the skills the author possesses, he prizes being able to read well at the apex. Why? Reading is an excellent leisure time activity. Through reading, one experiences vicariously travel, culture, recreation, pleasure, enjoyment, and appreciations. Being a proficient reader has helped to determine one's vocation, as well as avocational pursuits. There is much to be thankful for in being a quality reader. When viewing those

who do not read well, one wonders why this occurred. The following might have been involved:

* wasting one's time in school by rebelling against what was being taught with reading included.
* favoring what peers wanted and that was low achievement in school. Peer pressure can indeed be intense.
* parents not supporting the child nd his/her academic and school work. Perhaps, a parent even ridiculed what the school was attempting to teach.
* having too much to do at home such as taking care of siblings. Perhaps, many school days were missed due to absenteeism and tardiness involving many problematic situations. A child may also have stayed home and missed school for no apparent reason.
* being ill frequently hinders learning and achieving in reading, especially if the child has no desire to make up what was missed in ongoing lessons.
* experiencing mental retardation. It does take a certain mental capacity to achieve in reading. However, the will to learn is also important. The old adage, "Where there's a will, there's a way," has much to recommend itself.
* poor quality teaching. Teachers who fail to secure pupil attention in teaching, are not able to assist pupils to accept reasons for learning, establish poor quality sequence in pupil learning, fail to motivate pupils for learning, and do not provide adequately for individual differences in the classroom, make for inadequate learner achievement in children's literature (See Symonds, 2000).

With multiple intelligences theory of learning, it behooves teachers and principals to secure a variety of book titles for the school library. These library books need to stress

* objective thinking such as in the scientific world.
* creative thought such as in poetry and literature stressing fiction.
* athletic prowess and the use of the gross and finer muscles.
* verbal skills such as in reading and writing activities.
* space dimension abilities such as in geometry, mathematics, architecture, and art work.
* fine arts such as in dance, drama, movement experiences.
* study of people and their endeavors, as in the social studies (See Gardner, 1993).

Bibliotherapy in literature

Challenging literature may also be of interest to pupils pertaining to bibliotherapy. Here, pupils may receive a guidance resource through reading children's literature. Children with specific kinds of problems might then read about the following areas and how these individuals in the library book minimized problematic feelings or, in degrees, overcame their handicaps:

* illnesses such as cancer
* physical difficulties such as the inability to walk well
* handicaps faced such as in hearing or vision
* eating disorders such as in obesity
* excessive shortness or tallness in height
* speech disorders
* being excluded from social groups.

By reading challenging bibliotherapy library books, pupils may learn more about handicaps and thus be increasingly more accepting of these individuals who face diverse kinds of health and disability problems. Those who are handicapped might read about others who faced the same or similar problems as those do who are written about in bibliotherapy library books being read. Acceptance of the self is important and a wholesome self concept should be an end result. Reading a few library books on bibliotherapy may not do the job in part. But different approaches need to be tried to assist pupils to become more accepting of the self and of others. The normal child needs to keep abreast of the human condition and be helpful to others. The handicapped pupil, in return, might understand the self better as a result of reading about individuals who face related problems (Ediger, 1995, Chapter Fifteen).

The Computer and Children's Literature

Challenge in reading children's literature may come about by reading or listening to content on Computer Disks. In the school library as well as in public libraries, pupils may listen to diverse kinds and types of literature on CDs. Technology needs to be used to enhance and challenge pupils' learning. Technological tools need to be used to optimize achievement and progress in reading children's literature. A child may be able to read a library book after he/she has listened to the same contents on a Computer Disk. By listening to the CD, the child experiences readiness for the self selected reading activity. The CD may then serve as

* a role model for oral reading in terms of stress, pitch, and enunciation for the student.
* positive examples for structure of the English language as well as for syntactical models.
* providing content for indepth thinking (See Eddy, et. al. 1997).

Conclusion

Higher expectations for students in school is in the offing. To reach these expectations, students need to be challenged and motivated, not forced, to achieve at a higher level. Improved methods of teaching need to be stressed in assisting students to do better in the area of literacy achievement.

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